

Church, Stop Forcing People Struggling With Anxiety to Put on a Happy Face

Ever been to the church where there was a demand for everyone to wear a happy face?

Some churches are past that. Others are not. The happy church is one of the issues that drive the hypocrite narrative.

And I get it, though I am a believer in the church.

Mental Anxiety

All anxiety is brutal for Christians and non-Christians. I have empathy for both.

Suffering mental anxiety as a Christian is bad enough, but being forced to put on my happy face at church is an added struggle.

Here is Tabitha Yates' story:

Growing up as a church kid who suffered from severe depression, I was not met with the type of counsel and comfort one might have expected. I was faced with a surprising amount of misunderstanding, terrible advice and total estrangement in some cases. Now that I am older and hopefully wiser for the wear, I see that there is a much greater awareness about anxiety and depression in a general collective sense in the world. However, it is spoken about in hushed tones within the church.

We need to change that.

Do you remember the season when bipolar was coined as the new depression and disease? Many within the church consider mental

anxiety as a choice.

Wrong.

The tension is obvious. Mental disorders are difficult to diagnose and even more difficult to understand. If you have never suffered depression or anxiety, your empathy is undiscovered. If you have suffered from mental disorders or depression, your empathy is on full alert.

Anxiety Is Real

The number of Americans facing depression is staggering.

About 29% of people in the U.S. will meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder in their lifetime and 20.8% for a mood disorder like depression, Luana Marques, an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and the president of the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, told HuffPost.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health concern in the United States; 40 million adults in the U.S. (19.1%) have an anxiety disorder. Meanwhile, approximately 7% of children aged 3-17 experience issues with anxiety each year. Most people develop symptoms before age 21.

As the church struggles with treatment plans, medicines and education, the statistics continue to increase.

Pastors and Laymen

Twenty-three percent of all pastors deal with some form of mental illness. This statistic reveals how vital it is that the church develops empathy and education. Not only do pastors deal with mental illness, but almost 75% of pastors know someone who deals with a mental illness in their church.

Many churches neglect their role in mental health. Most pastors feel unqualified to jump into mental disorders.

Have we forgotten the power of the gospel? The gospel is adequate, and faith is a big factor in believers who overcome mental anxiety and depression.

Faith and prayer are great tools in fighting depression and anxiety. But faith and prayer are not enough.

You can pray for a broken finger, but you also need to acquire a splint and tape the finger. Am I right?

Ed Stetzer said: "Even those in secular branches of psychology and psychiatry say psychological health is better when people are connected with a faith community, and that should drive churches to healthy partnership with trained medical professionals."

Mental anxiety and depression are giant enemies that cripple many Christians. I am praying we are past the stage where we resist to embrace those battling these diseases.

I am also praying we are aware of medical technology and the use of effective medications. The other side of the coin are the churches that see mental illness as only a medical issue and abandon the power of God and the Scripture.

Ed Stetzer said, "I'm concerned that some Christians say, 'Let the doctors take care of everything,'" he says. "We can't outsource spiritual care."

The gospel is all-powerful and still transforms lives. Faith is huge in keeping the deeper pinnacles of depression at bay.

Additional tools to counteract anxiety and depression:

–Prayer.

–Worship.

–Medication.

–Diet.

–Exercise.

–Mentoring/counselor.

These statistics from LifeWay Research are alarming:

–4% of churchgoers who lost a loved one to suicide say church leaders were aware of their loved one's struggles.

–27% of churches have a plan to assist families affected by mental illness.

See where we are? Many churches are unprepared.

There is hope.

–53% of churchgoers with mental illness say the church has been supportive.

–68% of Americans feel they would be welcome in church if they were mentally ill.

The gospel is still a major part of believers overcoming depression and anxiety.

And the church must be a safe place for those dealing with anxiety and depression. The church must foster love and acceptance so that people will openly share their struggles.

It is vital that the church be equipped to deal with mental disorders in the coming years. The need demands it.

The church must embrace education and medication. And most of all, be ready to listen and love those suffering from all forms of mental illness. And let's not forget the command to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2).

This is the greatest source of healing the church can offer.
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